

## Undergraduates' Attitude toward Language in a Nigeria University

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**Abstract.** This study investigated the attitude of some graduating students of French language in a Nigerian University using Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye as an example. A total of forty-seven (47) students from penultimate (300level) and final year (400level) undergraduates from two faculties. Arts and Education were administered a structured questionnaire. These groups were chosen because they have undergone the mandatory. French language immersion programme in the Nigerian French language Village. Data collected were analysed with simple percentage and t-test statistics in SPSS statistical programme. The results revealed that students have positive attitudes towards learning the language. It also revealed that there is a significant difference, according to gender, academic levels and age in undergraduates' attitudes towards the study of French language.

**Keywords:** Attitude, graduating students, French, Nigerian Universities.

### 1. Background to the Problem

As a member of the sub-regional organisation of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Nigeria is a multi-cultural and multi-lingua country with over 400 indigenous languages. Majority of the members of this organization are French speaking: Republic of Benin, Cameroun, Niger and Chad etc. Therefore, it has become imperative for Nigeria to encourage the teaching and learning of French Language in her educational institution at all levels.

Ogunkeye (2007) and Ogunbiyi (2012) advance reasons why Nigeria adopted French as language to be taught and learnt in Nigerian schools. These include: to facilitate communication and interaction with the country's francophone neighbors,

international politics, job opportunities for individuals in international organizations such as African Union, United Nations, UNESCO and other multinational companies who may demand for proficiency in French.

French language is an international language and the 11 most spoken language in the world. The National Policy on Education (NPE 2014:10) asserts this by stating that:

*For smooth interaction with our neighbour, it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French. Accordingly, French shall be the second official language in Nigeria and it shall be compulsory in primary and junior secondary schools, but non-vocational elective at the senior secondary school.*

According to the policy, French language is expected to be taught in upper primary schools i.e. Basic 4-6, while it is compulsory for junior secondary schools and elective or optional at senior secondary school level. At the tertiary level, French language is offered as one of the university requirements (General Studies Course). It is also an important course of study for the Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) up to doctoral (Ph.D) level.

Teaching French as a foreign language became popular in Nigeria in 1960 with the realization of the need for interaction with her francophone neighbours. Subsequently, it was included in the secondary school curriculum. With the French government cooperation, French centres such as Centre for French Teaching and Documentation, Alliance Française, Centre International d'Etude Française; Pilot schools and the Nigerian French project were established to promote the study of the language and scholarship sponsorships were given to Nigerian students in tertiary institutions for a one-year abroad programme (Inyang, 2010; Bello and Ayelaagbe, 2015).

The psychological construct 'Attitude' has attracted increasing attention among scholars from different disciplines. Language researchers have not been left out of the discourse and studies. Several of the studies have concluded that success of students is a function of the belief, knowledge, perceptions and attitudes that students bring with them to the learning process. Language Learning is related to the attitudes towards languages (Karahana, 2007). Karahana (2007) opined contends that "positive language attitudes let learners to have a positive orientation towards learning English" (p. 87). Therefore, attitudes play a very crucial role in language learning.

Ajzen (1988; p. 4) defines attitudes as "a disposition to respond favourably or unfavourably to an object, person, institution, or events". Sometime, attitude can be used to describe persistence of human behavior". For instance, a person's attitude toward the environment influences whether or not they choose to recycle. A student's attitude toward information will influence the resources he or she chooses to use.

A Mmyriad of researches exist on attitudes towards different languages (Soku, Simpeh and Osafo-Adu, 2011; Liu and Zhang, 2013; Araromi, 2013; Kwabla, Makafui & Dwamena, 2017). Soku, Simpeh & Osafo-Adu (2011) examine attitudes of students to towards English and French. Results indicate that gender had has a significant effect on students' attitudes toward English; however, gender had has no significant effect on students' attitudes to the study of French, thus no significant difference exist between males and females in their attitudes to French. Age and level of students were found to have no significant effect on students' attitudes towards the study of English and French. In another study, Araromi (2013), reported that students' area of specialization has influence on attitudes of students towards French language. There is no significant difference between the male and female undergraduate students' attitude towards French language.

Kovac & Zdilar (2017) study was to locate the similarities and differences in attitudes and beliefs towards learning the German and Italian languages. Part of their results indicated that significant difference between the learners of Italian and German exist; the learners of German perceive the language as more difficult than Italian.

Furthermore, Kwabla, Makafui & Dwamenas' (2017), student was on teacher-trainees' attitude towards the learning of French language pronunciation in some colleges of education in Ghana. The results indicated that teacher-trainees have good attitudes towards the learning of pronunciation in the French language. Arani (2004) did a study in Iran and investigated the language

learning needs and attitudes towards learning English of medical students at Kashan University of Medical Sciences, forty-five medical students who enrolled in the first and second year of study participated in the study. The results showed that majority of the students had positive attitudes towards learning the English language. In Kuwaiti, Malallah (2000) studied the attitudes of Kuwaiti university students and found out the differences between attitudes of students from fields of study and academic levels. She found students' attitudes towards learning English to be pretty high on items that are in favour of English learning while student scores were pretty low on items that were against it.

Some studies have reported that attitudes toward a foreign language are also related with age and ethnic background. For instance, in Estonia, Ehala and Niglas (2006) found that students between 15 and 18 years of age living in rural areas had less positive attitudes toward the Estonian language (minority language) than students in urban areas. Sakuragi (2008) found that attitudes of college 7 students in USA toward a second language –Chinese, French, Japanese, or Spanish were related with social distance. Nahavandi and Mukundan (2013) investigated Iranian EFL engineering students' motivational orientations and attitudes towards English language learning. The results showed that the students had positive attitudes towards the English language.

Although, the French language is studied in Nigerian universities, there are few researches on attitudes of Nigerian undergraduates towards studying of the French language. This dearth of research was the reason for undertaking this study. The objective of the study was to investigate the attitudes towards learning French language among Nigerian university undergraduates studying the language for a degree. In pursuance of the objectives of this study, the following research questions were raised and answered:

- What is the general attitude of undergraduates studying the language towards French language?
- Is there any significant difference in attitude between male and female undergraduates studying the language towards French language?
- Is there any significant difference in attitude between 300 level and 400level undergraduates' studying the language towards French language?
- Is there any significant difference in attitude between age groups 19-23years and 24-30years studying the language towards French language?

**2. Method**

This study used a descriptive and quantitative research technique. A total of forty-seven (47) students from penultimate (300level) and final year (400level) undergraduates from two faculties- Arts and Education participated in the study. These groups were chosen because they have undergone the mandatory French language immersion programme in the Nigerian French Language Village. A survey questionnaire was developed from literature by the researchers to measure the attitudes of students to the study of French. The questionnaire comprised of two sections. The first section measured personal characteristics such as gender, age, level; and language background. The second section of the questionnaire comprised of 12 items, scored on a 5-pointing scale ranging between strongly disagree to strongly agree with 1 as the minimum score and 5 as the maximum score. The questionnaire was piloted on the two levels and Cronbach alpha result was 76.

Data collected was analysed with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), simple percentage and independent t-test was used in the evaluation of data.

**3. Findings**

Table 1 reveals the attitudes of the students towards learning French language in the university. More than two-third of the students agreed that 'French is my favourite language'. Majority (89.4) agreed that they always enjoyed learning French. The study further reveals that majority (44.9% disagreed and 15.9%, strongly disagreed) attend classes because they feel it is important. About Eight-nine percent (89.4%) said they want to become fluent in French, while 74.4 said that their French teachers had a dynamic and interesting teaching style. Almost two-third (66%) said that they like watching films/TV programmes made in French-speaking countries so as to improve their French-speaking.

**Table 1:** Undergraduate students' attitude towards learning of French language

S/N		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	French is my favourite language.	11 (23.4)	25(53.0)	6(12.8)	4(8.5)	1(2.1)
2	I have always enjoyed learning French.	24(51.1)	18(38.3)	3(6.4)	-	2(4.3)
3	I want to become fluent in French.	36(76.6)	6(12.8)	3(6.4)	1(2.1)	1(2.1)
4	My French teachers had a dynamic and interesting teaching style.	16(34.0)	19(40.4)	8(17.0)	2(4.3)	2(4.3)
5	I like watching films/TV programmes made in French speaking countries.	15(31.9)	16(34.0)	13(27.7)	2(4.3)	1(2.1)
6	I can rate myself as fluent in speaking French.	17(36.2)	12(25.5)	14(29.8)	2(4.3)	2(4.3)
7	Being able to speak French is important to me to be able to get a good job.	24(51.1)	15(31.9)	6(12.8)	2(4.3)	-
8	Knowing French is important to me for purposes of international travels.	25(53.1)	18(38.3)	4(8.5)	-	-
9	It is important to be able to speak both French and English.	25(53.1)	18(38.3)	4(8.5)	-	-
10	I want to be able to speak French and English fluently	27(57.4)	14(29.8)	5(10.6)	1(2.1)	-
11	I want French to be used more in Nigeria.	26(55.3)	13(27.7)	7(14.9)	1(2.1)	-
12.	I find French accents difficult to use in speech and writing.	25(53.2)	12(25.5)	9(19.1)	1(2.1)	-

The findings of the independent t-test analysis carried out are summarized in Table 2-4. An independent t-test analysis reveals that female undergraduates have mean score (19.921) higher than their male colleagues (18.900) thus suggesting that there is a significant difference between male and female undergraduate attitudes toward French language.

**Table 2:** Test of significance difference between male and female

Sex	N	Mean	Std.D	T	Sig.
Male	30	18.900	4.467	.675	503
Female	17	19.941	6.036		

In Table 3, independent-samples t-test of the academic level attitudes towards learning French was conducted and the mean score for 300 level (M = 20.427) was higher than that of 400 level (M = 18.363). The Levene's test showed that the two groups assume equal variance (Sig. -1.421 > 0.05). Thus, there is a statistically significant difference between the means of the two groups.

**Table 3: Test of significance difference in academic level.**

Level	N	Mean	Std.D	T	Sig.
400level	26	18.346	4.363	1.421	162
300level	21	20.427	5.688		

We also conducted independent-samples t-test to find out the difference between age groups attitudes towards French language. The mean score for 24-30years (M = 21.500) was higher than that of 19-23years (M = 18.82). The Levene’s test showed that the two groups assume equal variance (Sig. >0.05). There is a statistically significant difference between the means of the two groups because the probability figure (Sig. 2-tailed = 0.000) is higher than 0.05.

**Table 4: Test of significance difference in age**

Age	N	Mean	Std.D	T	Sig.
19-23years	39	18.820	5.046	1.380	174
24-30years	8	21.500	4.751		

**4. Discussion and Conclusion**

This study investigated the Nigerian undergraduates’ attitudes to the study of French. The results demonstrated that the French language undergraduates have positive attitudes towards learning the language. The result is in agreement with findings of Gerena (2010) who found positive attitudes toward both the English and Spanish languages in Spanish-speaking kindergarten and first grade students participating in a Spanish two-way immersion programme.

It also revealed that there is significant difference according to gender, academic levels and age in undergraduates’ attitudes towards the study of French language. The results of this study negated Soku, Kwabena & Osafo-Adu (2011) and Araromi (2013), who reported that there is no significant difference between the male and female undergraduate students’ attitude towards French language. It was also found that significant difference exist in attitude of students’ to the study of French language. Further, it was revealed that there is significant difference in the attitude of students towards the study of French based on academic level.

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